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ABSTRACT

This monograph on the issues of leadership, power, and influence summarizes information gleaned from working with and interviewing administrators at Canadian colleges and universities. The study notes, first, that decision-making environments in Canadian postsecondary organizations are multidimensional, characterized by interdependence, diversity, and varying paradigms of authority. A second observation is that effective decision-making in university environments requires an understanding of the limits of decision-making. The main portion of the report focuses on the structural, personal, and situational attributes of effective leadership, including among the structural attributes rank/position, being in the right unit, one's location in a communication network, one's reporting relationship, control over resource allocation, and organizational culture. Personal attributes are defined as including vision, ethos, and integrity; intellectual and socialization skills; one's appearance and social activities; and a willingness to influence. Among situational attributes are the ability to manage external problems; and effectively managing external clients. Finally, the paper discusses how effective administrators enhance their potential for effectiveness, identifying the following behaviors: exercising influence and persuasion in strategic ways; setting priorities, using structured decision-making processes; establishing policy convergences; building a team; and managing conflict. A list of study participants and questions reviewed with administrators is appended. (Contains approximately 100 references.) (CH)

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# Determinants of Administrative Effectiveness: Why Some Academic Leaders Are More Influential and Effective Than Others*

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## Determining Administrative Effectiveness

Why are some Presidents, Vice Presidents, Deans or Directors more effective and influential in implementing their vision and ideas than others? Why are some successful, while others merely stumble through their terms or careers, leaving a scant mark on the school, department, or college. In this regard, how important is managing the perceptions of others or controlling factors in the external environment, or is building a successful team the key to success?

Does "position" matter more than one's "personal" attributes? Is being a strategic planner or motivator more important than responding effectively to the desires of colleagues, supervisors, or key organizational clients? Can we identify what specific behaviours or actions are associated with effective decision-making practices and outcomes for senior administrators in Canadian institutions?

We have spent the last six years working with and interviewing administrators from Canadian colleges and universities. To the best of our knowledge, our participants represent the largest group of senior Canadian administrators (academic and staff) studied on the issues of leadership, power, and influence.[1] We offer several observations about powerful and influential people, i.e., those having the ability to implement their vision, their ideas, and accomplish their agenda in complex academic organizations. What contributes to administrative influence and effectiveness? To answer this question, we first discuss our observations about the environment in which the most effective academic leaders function.

Our first observation is that decision-making environments in Canadian postsecondary organizations are multidimensional, characterized by three unique organizational features: interdependence, diversity, and varying paradigms of authority. The most effective leaders understand these organizational attributes:

**Interdependence:** Because relatively few senior administrators have formal authority over all those whose support they need to be effective, a necessity exists to influence (and be influenced by) colleagues, supervisors and subordinates in different departments or divisions, to get things accomplished. Those who are effective decision-makers work with (and through) others.

**Diversity:** Colleges and universities employ individuals who bring significant differences in outlook and orientation to the workplace. For example, people have different goals and tasks, working styles, conflicting stakes in decisional outcomes and different views toward the importance of work. The most effective academic leaders are able to manage interpersonal conflict because "diverse" work populations often do not agree on organizational goals.

**Varying Paradigms of Authority:** Colleges and universities reflect different models of authority due to the variety and complexity of tasks performed. For example, in regard to many complex business transactions, hierarchical-based authority is employed, e.g., a Vice President directs a subordinate to take action. In other cases, bureaucratic policies, procedures and behaviours are

[1] A list of institutions where our study partipants work is listed in Appendix A. Our research questions are set forth in Appendix B.

essential, sanctioned and used, particularly for routine administrative functions where little oversight is exercised. In research and design or the management of human behaviour, professional authority (based on individual expertise and education) holds sway. Alternately, individuals may exercise authority because of their knowledge of an important provincial issue, institutional longevity, or their work involves traditional and symbolic activities. Still others are influential because of their intelligence, quick wit, good looks, or charisma. In respect to the question of influence and authority, assessing who may have more authority is not as straightforward as it may seem. For example, who do you think would have more authority over a decision to upgrade educational standards or change the curriculum — the President or the faculty member who is the only Nobel Laureate in the institution? Those who are most effective understand that different models of authority are operative (sometimes simultaneously) and management styles and behaviour must be changed to accommodate them.

Our second observation is that in university environments, being an effective decision-maker requires an understanding of the limits of decision-making. We argue that a decision by itself changes nothing. In other words, at the moment a decision is made, you nor your colleagues know whether it was the correct or incorrect decision. Indeed, most people spend more time living with the consequences of their decisions than they do in making them. The point about decision-making is this: leaders know how to influence others in order to gain support for implementing decisions and, most importantly, they know how to manage the consequences of their decisions. Managing the consequences of decisions means that one controls ever present organizational and competitive pressures, both internal and external, invariably focused on successful executives. Such pressures emanate from many sources: a scarcity of resources, the politicization of board members, the need for specialized workers, licensing agencies, provincial or federal dictates, work force demands (part-time vs. full-time employment), labour unions and the like. Most senior administrators in Canadian institutions spend the majority of their time reacting to people's agendas. In reality, decision-making prerogatives are constrained. Those who wish to make change or implement a vision are proactive. They continually endeavour to encourage others to react to "their" agenda!

Our third observation leads us to focus on what we call "structural," "personal," or "situational" attributes. While possessing all attributes is not a prerequisite for being effective, possessing some, even one, can be. What are these attributes?

### "Structural" Attributes of Effective Administrators

**Rank and Position:** Rank or position within the organization is important (it helps to be president). However, rank and position is not always determinative in the exercise of power. Take, for example, the case of a senior vice president who is perceived as an individual with an inadequate understanding of the organization or a president who announces a retirement or the end of their term. People pay far less, if any, attention to them! Many senior Deans and Vice Presidents privately lament that they cannot get much accomplished or, more specifically, get anyone to do what "they" want them to do. We argue that rank and position undoubtedly provide considerable advantage in the distribution of resources, the ability to reward desired

behaviours, or the authority to stop certain management initiatives. We also observed that those in senior positions are frequently dependent on others who must actually carry out "their" directives.

**The Right Unit:** Being in the right unit helps immeasurably. For example, in institutions dependent on computer technology, the senior communication and technology officer can wield authority and influence greater than other vice presidents. At this time, those who can gain increased funding from provincial legislators or raise funds through the development of entrepreneurial endeavours (business-university partnerships) probably wield an unusual degree of influence. We define the "right unit" as one which entails the management of a critical institutional dependency, i.e., managing an important internal or external issue or problem to which the organization must respond. In Canada, for example, those who presently engage in fundraising, computer technology, business-university endeavours, relations with provincial governments, or legal affairs may have a disproportionate amount of influence on many campuses (more so than academic deans or senior faculty) because they operate in areas where "critical" issues must be addressed, e.g., a revenue enhancing function in times of declining external resources.

**Location in the Communication Network:** Successful administrative behaviour depends on one's ability to know what is going on and who is talking about what to whom! The existence of informal communication networks attest to this observation. Knowing who needs what from whom enables those who seek influence to be involved in "reciprocal" activities. One reason the office next to the President or Vice President is coveted has to do with opportunities to interact with the "foot traffic" — the opportunity to converse with other decision-makers. Of course, having a strategically located office allows others to perceive the "importance" of the office holder. Conversely, it would be the rare individual who could be influential or effective who was not connected to the organization through e-mail, or whose office is situated miles away from the main administrative building.

**Reporting Relationship:** One's influence and effectiveness can be enhanced by the person to whom one reports. Normally, the more status and authority that is accorded a supervisor, the larger the halo effect to the subordinate. Individuals who report to officers who have organizational clout (because they manage a critical function, unit, or new initiative) have an easier time exercising their own influence because one can marshal stronger (resource richer) allies during periods of conflict or stress. One practical implication of this observation is that those who are most effective understand they benefit from helping a supervisor (or group of supportive board members) succeed.

**Control over Resource Allocation:** The old quip, those with the gold make the golden rules, is true in most organizations. Individuals who dispense resources and assist others in accomplishing their tasks, those who can reward allies and friends for their loyalty, are more influential. The staff "assistant" or "associate" who helps balance the budget can have, should they choose to exercise it, significant influence and authority over other line managers because of the latter's dependence on the chief business officer. We found that the most effective institutional leaders usually control or influence resource allocation processes.

## "Situational" Attributes of Effective Administrators

**Managing External Problems:** The ability to enhance one's internal influence through managing external problems or initiatives is of interest. One reason why, for example, human resources officers or the university counsel have accrued influence in recent times can be attributed, in our opinion, to their strategic presence in managing conflict, encouraging diversity, or helping a school navigate through a maze of legal or provincial statutes. These are important matters with significant internal budget implications. However, once problems are solved, individuals who are responsible for managing these kinds of internal or external functions many lose their influence.

**Managing External Clients:** The management of ongoing relationships with key external constituencies (provincial or federal representatives, the media, community groups, federal agencies, board members) can be determinative in maintaining internal effectiveness. This is one reason the secretary to board committees attains influence beyond that normally associated with secretarial positions. Presidents spend considerable time with board members, influential political or academic figures or, more recently, corporate sponsors. Those who effectively facilitate these relationships can increase their internal effectiveness because of the importance of these activities to the institution or to other senior officers.

## Enhancing Administrative Effectiveness Potential

Situational, structural or personal attributes of senior administrators may be valued differently depending upon the organizational context or specific institutional and demographic variables (e.g., institutional size, research capabilities, geographic location, etc.) In all cases, however, action determines whether one is influential and effective. How then do the most influential act or behave? We have identified the following behaviours:

**They exercised influence, persuasion, and effectiveness in strategic ways. They select three or four priorities and ask themselves:** Who else is or will be influential as I try to achieve this priority? Whose cooperation and support will I need? Whose opposition could delay or derail specific actions? What strategies or actions will I employ to gain support? They are aware that after one year, a predecessor's problems will become their problem. They are visionaries to constituents who object to their goals or who may have the power to block new initiatives. They offer those who oppose them realistic and creative alternatives. Several techniques involve managing people. These kinds of administrators placed allies in the vanguard of those responsible for executing their decisions. If allies embodying one's ideas are influential, the decision is more likely to be implemented. Later, they reward people whose actions helped promote desired goals. Rewards were accorded through giving increased "prestige," "status," or "public acclaim," not simply compensation. The most effective leaders we studied know who their primary constituencies are and cultivate their organizational allies.

**They structured decision-making processes.** Decisions in and of themselves do not result in action. More efficient and concrete outcomes arise when processes used to implement decisions are structured, i.e., committees appointed, tasks defined, priorities set, and perhaps most importantly, core constituencies and key individuals given a vested interest in outcomes. We

identified the most effective decision-making structures as those that blended ad hoc and permanent constituent members, legitimized through formal appointments. Committee processes must be managed carefully or endless debate may ensue. This kind of formalized or structured approach enables effective administrators to implement decisions even if they lacked the "status" of possessing a senior position or title! Structured decisional processes, when used correctly, preclude an "end run." Committees that mandate everyone "agree" with the process (even if individuals may disagree with a specific recommendation) were especially effective when (as is often the case) decisions and recommendations cross formal jurisdictional lines. Effective people gather input (and appoint committees) with representatives from the organization's best minds — a difficult task because of the proclivity of many to interact primarily with those people with whom they feel most comfortable.

**They established policy convergence.** Policies and procedures establish the basis upon which others act, are evaluated, and provide a basis whereby actions are legitimized or sanctioned. Effective individuals work to insure that policies and procedures reflect "their" visions and priorities. Said another way, organizational policies must support goals and not inhibit sought for outcomes. For example, policies which prevent the roll over of funds may result in people spending unused moneys on frivolous items at year's end rather than encourage responsible spending. In these contexts, those who seek to promote responsible fiscal management may be undermined by institutional policies discouraging prudent behaviour. For example, standards for promotion or compensation criteria must be modified if a Dean seeks to redirect the priorities of a particular department. In this sphere, however, changes often require agreement and assistance of other executives, middle managers, and senior faculty. In our experience, new priorities are best engineered when they result from mutual agreement on criteria or objectives related to legitimized academic outcomes.

**They built a team.** The people we studied, who we believe are most effective, know they require an intelligent, proactive, energetic and loyal team. Without one, the ability to manage a unit or division diminishes. Effective and influential people manage their team by providing a positive emotional atmosphere, rewarding and encouraging individuals in visible and immediate ways, letting them do their jobs by promoting independence, initiative and responsibility, discouraging inappropriate and dysfunctional (competitive) behaviour, and setting the right example in their own work and behaviour.

They engaged in strategic positioning. How do the most effective administrators conceive of strategic planning? They review key priorities and goals with their colleagues, senior team or department heads. Then, as a team, they addressed the following questions:

- Have short-term and long-term objectives been defined?
- Is a strategy to achieve objectives well-defined?
- How will new initiatives or programs be introduced in different functional units?
- How will organizational resistance be handled?
- What resources will be required?

**Traditional and Symbolic Functions:** Many individuals who work in colleges and universities covet "tradition." Indeed, developing an "organizational culture" conducive to entrepreneurial or strategic behaviour, demands that "symbols" for reinforcing effective behaviour be utilized. Individuals who are responsible for tasks the academic community deems traditional or symbolic, can enhance their effectiveness because the activities of others may be held subservient to their function. This is particularly so when the "function" is managed by one with "seniority," i.e., longevity often being a powerful predictor of influence in many divisions or departments.

## "Personal" Attributes of Effective Administrators

**Vision, Ethos, Integrity:** It is unquestionably the case that to maintain influence and effectiveness, one must be seen as a person of moral integrity and probity, as a person who can articulate a vision consistent with "values" legitimized by the wider academic community. Those in positions of influence and authority often loose their effectiveness (even their jobs) when key organizational constituents (faculty, board members, politicians) lose confidence in their ethical judgment.

**Intellectual and Socialization Skills:** We value expertise, good judgment and knowledge. Those have it are accorded respect and admiration. However, to exercise influence over others, these attributes must go hand-in-hand with political and social skills, the ability to be flexible, sensitive, empathetic to the needs of others, having the strength to submerge one's ego. Selflessness is important, or at least a certain degree of humility. With a few notable exceptions, the arrogant, brash, pompous, didactic, mean-spirited or narcissistic types fail to become influential because colleagues are reluctant to trust or align themselves with these individuals.

**Appearance and Social Activities:** Those who have influence pay attention to how they look and act, how their offices are appointed, what business functions they attend, and with whom they choose to socialize. They are mindful of appearances and the subtle and overt symbolic actions that can influence how others perceive their work or presence. It is, for better or worse, not coincidental that many in leadership positions look the part. Good looks alone will never assure one of long-term influence. However, we argue that academics, faculty, students, and the like, often seek to be represented by those who resemble some idealized versions of what Canadians deem "representative." One need only to come into contact with a large number of college and university presidents to test this caveat.

**A Willingness to Influence:** We argue that being effective is related to one's ability to tolerate conflict, take risks (by making decisions), and engage in tenacious (and principled) behaviour toward defined goals. One cannot articulate goals and objectives and sit by passively, hoping these goals (or the work of others) will materialize. There is no substitute for discipline, stamina, energy, focus, and determination — what has been described as ambition and drive. A sense of humor also helps. In other words, those who seek to be influential believe the sin of omission (doing nothing) is far worse than the sin of commission (doing something), even if one makes an error in judgment!

- Who will coordinate the plan and the team(s)?
- How will the plan be reflected in the mission of the organization?
- What steps must be taken in various units to integrate the way decisions are made or services provided?
- How will a decrease in the will to implement the plan be responded to?
- What is the appropriate response to the loss of motivation and support?
- What actions are required to inform the organization of the plan and its purpose?
- What will be the plan's impact on people, functions, etc.? How will it be determined when everyone possesses the requisite knowledge and skills?
- How will the plan's consequences be identified and assessed?
- What behavioural changes are expected of employees and middle managers?
- How will these changes be assessed?

**They managed conflict.** Individuals who implement decisions effectively know that "change" is associated with conflict primarily because people usually have a vested interest in the way "work" is conducted. The most effective do not avoid conflict, they manage it. Redirecting the priorities, possibilities or mission of a unit, department, or school requires organizational tension. Managing conflict requires encouraging opposing constituencies to choose a course of action early on; offering real alternatives to those who oppose you; advancing the notion of "mutual interests" rather than permitting opposing parties to focus on their respective "positions."

**They timed their actions.** Once appointed, effective administrators start convincing a core constituency to agree on priority objectives and, as well, measurable criteria for success. Following this, they ensured that "someone" was responsible for evaluating actions in support of identified measures. Colleges and universities (particularly in academic areas) are populated by people skeptical of those in authority. Effective administrators do not confront the whole community at once — they choose priorities, allies and adversaries carefully, and at the right time. They do not overlook the right incentives. They know that others will not "follow along" simply because someone is "right." People embrace a vision when ideas provided to them resonate with their own intrinsic or extrinsic priorities. The most effective people we worked with calibrated their decisions and actions to coincide with the organizational culture.

**They sought accountability.** Those who seek to be effective and wield influence demand accountability. They believe that unless there are consequences for "behaviour," one cannot achieve institutional objectives. They believe that administrators who are vindictive, territorial, jealous, lax, or sanction (look the other way) inappropriate behaviour should not have a place in their organization. They believe that people should be accountable for information rendered, i.e., they demand of others and of themselves well-conceived and adequately presented institutional data. Their opinions and ideas are based on solid and defensible assumptions. They know that others cannot be held accountable in an environment where there is little or no agreement on

performance objectives. They appoint self-motivated people, set goals, ask for benchmark measures of success and demand more than simple acquiescence!

### Concluding Thoughts for Those Who Seek to Enhance Their Effectiveness

We found that "decision-making" was a political process in the Canadian schools we studied. In this sense, decisions are not really made, instead they come unstuck, are reversed, get unmade during their execution, or lose their impact as vested interest groups fight them. In real life, decisions go round and round in circles. Sometimes the best one can hope for in the decisional political battle is a temporary win.

As a consequence, those who seek to enhance their effectiveness must learn how to champion ideas and agitate for their success. This means important decisions must be tracked even after they have been made. What do people do after a committee has reached its decision? They evaporate. The person who traces the decision flow on through to execution and who objects when issues are distorted, is the person who will be influential and effective in the long run. The truly dedicated who want to implement decisions act like tenacious watchdogs, monitoring the steps of the decision and, when necessary, call public attention to lapses in implementation.

We also found that those who sought to enhance their effectiveness gave their ideas "sheltered starts." If placed back into the regular routine of the organization, a new idea may be smothered by powerful old routines. As a consequence, the effective individual builds a shelter around "change" in its infancy. This often means giving a program or idea a home under the wing of a strong and hospitable ally. Only later, after a new idea has established roots, can it be integrated successfully into the regular structure of the college or university.

Our last observation about those who seek to enhance administrative effectiveness may seem incongruous. We urge a healthy degree of skepticism about one's own accomplishments. Do not make deep ego-investments in people, projects, or programs that will become successful. Engage in a continual evaluation process. Judge whether your performance actively lives up to others' expectations. Evaluating one's own ideas as objectively as possible and listening carefully to the evaluations of others are valuable and necessary skills. Those who seek to be most influential engaged in these processes continually.

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## Appendix A

Our study participants work in the following Canadian colleges and universities:

Algoma UniversityAthabasca University
Brock University
Carleton University
Concordia University
Dalhousie University
Douglas College
Lakehead University
Laurentian University
McGill University
McMaster University
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Nipissing University
Okanagan University College
Open University
Queen's University
Regent College
Royal Military College of Canada
Ryerson Polytechnic University
St. Francis Xavier University
Saint Mary's University
Saint Thomas Moore College
Simon Fraser University
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology
Trent University
Université de Moncton
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
University College
University of Alberta
The University of British Columbia
The University of Calgary
University of Guelph
The University of Lethbridge
The University of Manitoba
University of New Brunswick
University of Northern British Columbia
University of Ottawa
University of Prince Edward Island
The University of Regina
University of Saskatchewan
University of Toronto

University of Victoria
University of Waterloo
The University of Western Ontario
University of Windsor
The University of Winnipeg
Wilfrid Laurier University
York University

## Appendix B

Questions reviewed with Canadian administrators:

1. How is "influence" conceived of in your organization?
2. Whose decisions/influence matter? Why? What are the characteristics of those whose decisions matter.
3. Describe what has occurred to people who oppose those individuals cited in #2 above (long-term/short-term).
4. Are there issues around which power/influence coalesce?
5. How is power/influence exercised in your organization?
6. Describe a situation where power has been used against you.
7. Describe a situation where you needed greater power/influence to accomplish a task(s).
8. Identify situation(s) where power/influence has been used to affect positive change.
9. Identify situation(s) where power/influence has been used in a negative way.
10. What could have been done to change the scenario in question #9.